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Road trip: Port-au-Prince to Les Cayes
March 1948 (from field notes)

The paved road to the west of Port-au-Prince follows the coastline at a varied distance. It leads first to Carrefour, where we saw a baptism at the Catholic Church ([PH802](#)). An attempt is being made to turn Carrefour into an entertainment center for tourists, with the building of several simple structures to serve as night clubs ([PH803](#), [804](#)).

At Carrefour, to the south of the road, another, narrower road leads upward toward Trois Rivières, where a number of city people are building houses. There is a market at Trois Rivières, with trucks bringing people and merchandise ([PH805](#)).

Between Carrefour and Gressier, there are five Protestant churches of different denominations. From Gressier to Grand Goâve there are none. However, from Grand Goâve to the West and South, all towns, however small, have enormous imposing calvaries of the type one sees in Brittany ([PH808](#), [809](#), [810](#), [811](#), [812](#), [813](#), [814](#), [815](#)). Traditionally, Catholic missionaries to Haiti have been Bretons, trained in a special school for missionary work in Haiti. (The Breton and other foreign priests were expelled by François Duvalier, who encouraged the Haitianization of the clergy and, paradoxically, American Protestant missionizing.)

Between Carrefour and Gressier, there are long stretches of rice cultivation along the north side of the road. Although this is hoeing season, there are no *konbit* (cooperative hoeing parties) to be seen. At one place we see a man and a boy working. The boy, perhaps 10 years old, is completely naked.

Tuesday is market day at Gressier and we see a great many people streaming to the town from all directions, especially women and young girls. They come on foot and on donkeys, with great loads on their heads and on the animals ([PH816](#), [817](#), [818](#), [819](#), [820](#), [821](#), [823](#), [824](#), [825](#), [826](#)). (See note on markets and marketing.)

Between Gressier and Léogane, the road runs along the fields of the HASCO (Haitian American Sugar Company) [see note on Brache.] Brache, as a stop on the road, is located here. To the south of the road, there are hills in the near distance. Among the crops grown here is millet. Goats can be seen clearing one harvested field ([PH826](#), [827](#), [828](#), [829](#), [830](#), [831](#)).

West of Léogane, there are houses on both sides of the road, all the way to the small town of Grand Goâve. We pass Carrefour du Fort, the town that is the regional “headquarters” of the Rara (or Walwadi) [See note on festivals: carnival and Rara.]. Again market day with much activity. Here again sugar cane is grown, but not by HASCO. There are many sugar mills for the making of *clairin* (raw rum). (Alcohol is more profitable than sugar cane.) These are run by horse power and look antiquated.

There are graves all along the road, and here and there an offering on a masonry tomb: an orange, a piece of sugar cane, other foods or flowers. (See note on cemeteries and burials.)

At Fanche the road becomes increasingly rutted.

Grand Goâve is a very small town; Petit Goâve is a larger and more substantial town, with a large white church ([PH832](#), [833](#), [834](#), [835](#)). There is a meticulously clean, well-kept market place, with platforms, much better than any market place in Port au Prince. Police check for weapons. Even the streets are cleaner. There are several coffee factories and even private homes have coffee drying platforms.

After Petit Goâve, all along the road there are fires: the peasants are burning the underbrush, waiting for the rainy season. Large stretches of mountainous territory appear to be sparsely inhabited.

The next town, again on the coast, is Miragoâne ([PH836](#), [837](#), [838](#), [839](#), [840](#), [EH841](#), [842](#), [843](#), [844](#)). This was at one time an important town, now there seems to be little activity. The main road does not even touch Miragoâne now. There is a large church ([EH844](#)). The natural beauty of this area is striking. [In later years, beginning in 1957, Reynolds Metal Company mined bauxite here, and built something of an infrastructure including a port to export the material. The facility was abandoned in 1982, possibly because the deposits were exhausted.]

At the crossroad past Miragoâne there is an excellent, clean, inexpensive eating place. The road here turns south, toward the mountains.

The shapes of the houses along the road now change somewhat: they are larger, seem cleaner, many built of stone, with interior rather than exterior *galeries* (verandas). Most strikingly, the shape of the graves changes: many look like little houses. The majority of the graves are next to individual private homes. Only rarely are there cemeteries and these are mostly near larger centers ([PH845](#), [846](#), [847](#), [848](#), [849](#), [850](#)). Some of the tombs are large and imposing, white and black with enormous crosses. This is increasingly the case on the way south, across the mountains, toward the plain of Les Cayes. (See note on tombs and cemeteries.)

Fonds des Nègres is located at the crest of mountains, at the watershed. It was an important historic location: in 1701 it is reported to have been a very prosperous town of “mulattoes and free Negroes” (Le Père Labat, 1724). It is still the major market center for the entire Southern peninsula. One knowledgeable woman, whose husband owns a coconut plantation near Les Cayes, claims merchants from Port-au-Prince do business there to the amount of \$1,000 per day. For miles around people could be seen streaming toward the market. By 4-5 p.m., the market closes down and people leave to get home before nightfall.

There are ritual tombs (not burials) at the center of the market place, and lame beggars ([PH851](#), [852](#), [853](#), [854](#)). [The area is also the locale of the 1960 novel *Fonds de Nègres*

by the Haitian writer, Marie Vieux Chauvet, highlighting its significance in its own way. See also a study of the Fonds-des-Nègres market place by S. W. Mintz, 1961]

The approach to Les Cayes is impressive, going downhill toward the plain and the bay. We visit a coconut plantation, fronting on the sea. One of the plantation workers was bathing a horse in the sea ([EH855](#), [856](#), [857](#), [858](#), [859](#), [860](#), [861](#), [862](#), [863](#), [864](#)).

Les Cayes, facing the Caribbean Sea, is the center of an agricultural region. It is a substantial town with a port, a good deal of commercial activity, paved streets, stores and well-built churches ([PH865](#), [866](#), [867](#), [868](#), [869](#)).

References :

Chauvet, Marie Vieux. *Fonds des Nègres*. Port-au-Prince: Editions Deschamps, 1960.

Labat, Pr. Jean Baptise. *Nouveau Voyage aux Iles de l'Amérique*. The Hague: P. Husson, 1724.

Mintz, S.M. "Standards of value and units of measure in the Fonds des Nègres market place." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 91 (1961): 23-38.